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ABSTRACT

Topics covered in these essays on testing in high school English are (1) the need for major literature tests to determine not factual recall but whether students are growing into rational and humane persons through their experiences with English; (2) the usefulness of pre-tests and re-tests, and the need to emphasize tests as a means of instruction; (3) the process of designing a minimum essentials test in English; (4) the need for departmental criteria to achieve consistency in testing methods and objectives; (5) the usefulness of an attitude scale to evaluate the changing personal reactions of students to literature; and (6) the usefulness of the essay test in teaching the concept of literary analysis. (MF)

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Testing in English

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From Theories to Tools to Tests

A Preface

Once upon a time, a few years ago to be fairly accurate, new and newly-revived theories about English and the teaching of English started trickling into the secondary curriculum from several small tributaries. Beginning teachers, fresh from a single course in structual linguistics and older teachers, partially retreaded by a summer course or workshop, went abroad by two's and three's to see just how far they could go with a little knowledge about something new.

But now there are signs of a flood. Well-financed curriculum study centers are giving considerable attention to creating, field testing, and revising new theories and new designs in the teaching of language, literature, and composition. As a result, new courses of study are emerging. Armed with new directions and government funds, English institutes will spring up in many places across the nation this summer. Thousands of teachers will try to make a difference in 1965.

New tools—as yet mainly limited to pioneering or transitional textbooks, teaching machines, paperbacks in abundance, units and kits of multi-level materials geared for individualized self-instruction, and mass media (primarily educational television, projection equipment for transparencies, and tapes for oral practices with language)—are becoming familiar sights in a few schools. There is a shortage of tools to test theories, but here also the signs point to more than a trickle. What marriages will take place between publishers and computing centers or broadcasting companies? What new tools will be developed and field tested at curriculum study centers in the next few years? Will automation and mass media relegate the printed page to a minor role in English classes of tomorrow?

We are witnessing the translation of fresh ideas into courses of study; we are even using a few tools which try these ideas and units in our classrooms. But are we aware of the extent to which new theories and new tools pose new questions about evaluation? With the floodgates about to burst, what of the lag between theories and tools on one hand and evaluation on the other?

More testing in English cannot be the solution. Students have already been tested too often on the same things, too often on insignificant or wrong things, and too often in ways that do not test. How can we move to close the gap?

Contributors to this special issue on testing suggest at least these four steps:

1. *Establish a good beginning by asking many good questions about testing in English.* Testing in English must grow from the kinds of questions that have led to advances in English. A few years ago a group of leaders in English asked the question "What is English?" and put it at the head of their published list of "Basic Issues in the Teaching of English." The members of this group didn't find any satisfying answers to this question, but they probably helped to establish the current vogue of asking questions about English. Inductive inquiries are pointing to new taxonomies in language, literature, and rhetoric—even to ways of shaping new structures in content into new structures for teaching and learning. And now we find that we have not asked, "What is testing in English?" Evaluation is far behind the growing spirit and pace of creation in English, but it *can* make a good start. It has only to become something to ask questions about. Mr. Hach and Miss Bremer offer a good start by asking some excellent questions.

2. *Develop cooperatively rationale and criteria for teacher-made tests.* Statements such as those listed by Miss Stapp's department grow from the kinds of questions raised by Mr. Hach and Miss Bremer. To be of value to an English program, these statements must be everyone's creation. Self-sufficient teachers in self-sufficient classrooms apart from each other in the same building are anachronisms, knowing of no sequential program and creating none.

One point not brought out in Miss Stapp's outline but known to this editor is that the teachers at MacArthur High School also work cooperatively at scope and sequence in their testing program. Test items in language do not simply repeat from year to year but increase in breadth, depth, and application. Items in literature increase in sophistication as students mature to higher conceptual levels.

3. *Experiment in test construction.* Afraid of "meandering in mazy motion" through "caverns measureless to man," many English teachers have avoided experimental testing. In his article, Mr. Hach says, "If the emphasis in modern education is to be on altering behavior patterns, not on memory and the acquisition of knowledge *per se,* then our major tests in literature must be of the type that requires pupils to use knowledge and demonstrate their control over it." Miss Barker's article demonstrates in great

detail that such tests are possible. Miss Weber's article demonstrates that even attitudes can be tested if the teacher is willing to experiment with different formats.

4. *Work hard and persistently at teacher-made tests.* To state this point bluntly, creativity must be mixed with grit and sweat. Mr. Cantrall's article, though written in a delightful style and with a dry sense of humor, does what is necessary to make this fact clear. Working together in the way that Mr. Cantrall describes, English teachers should have a better chance to produce good tests and to have their efforts recognized.

W. H. Evans

Improving Testing in English

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That pupils today are well tested is a truism with which all of us will agree. But are they tested well? A positive answer to that question is one all of us cannot readily give. It's the question, however, with which we should concern ourselves because, as Floyd Rinker, executive director of the Commission on English of the College Entrance Examination Board, says, ". . . an English teacher defines most sharply and most revealingly what he believes about English in the examination questions he uses for his students."

How many of us are willing to be judged by the examinations we give? How many of us give major unit examinations or semester or year-end examinations in which the emphasis is on memory processes and the acquisition of knowledge? About how many of us can it be said that most, if not all, of our essay examinations primarily require repeating what we and pupils in our classes have said or what they have read?

Of course there is a place for tests requiring only recall of information, but there is need for a shift of emphasis, particularly in unit or major examinations, to those tests that stress the application of knowledge. Too many of us who were brought up on the older conception of education that placed primary emphasis upon memory processes and the acquisition of knowledge *per se* continue to practice in our major tests the basic assumption that underlies that kind of learning—that acquired knowledge will, *per se,* transmit itself into appropriate action patterns. Those of us who have taught for a while know that such transfer doesn't readily occur, and we know, too, that such tests do not reflect a classroom in which true intellectual activity takes place.

How many major or final examinations in English are still of the type that ask for identification of characters in a play, for example, that ask for specific facts of the story, that require pupils to identify the characters who spoke certain lines or to identify the characters to whom the lines refer? All such questions are appropriate, of course, for certain purposes, but aren't they more useful as quizzes during the study of a particular work? Don't they serve as a test of how well a pupil understands the facts of a literary work or, even more likely, of whether a pupil has actually read the work? Should these factual questions be part of a major test? If a class has spent several weeks studying *Macbeth,* for

example, isn't it likely to assume that nearly every pupil can identify characters and does know the story. For the final examination on *Macbeth* shouldn't we do more than create an examination that is more or less a compilation of all the little quizzes we have given along the way? If we test factual knowledge of the play at all, shouldn't we require pupils to use facts in meaningful situations, in discussions that also don't require rehashing what has been said in class? Shouldn't we ask ourselves why we are teaching the play and create some questions that relate to an understanding of a Macbeth or Lady Macbeth like characters in history or in contemporary affairs? Shouldn't we ask pupils to demonstrate their power to read and interpret Shakespearean lines with lines from the play that were not discussed in detail in class? Shouldn't we ask pupils to analyze the effectiveness of the "Tomorrow" speech, for example, especially if we did not analyze it in detail in class? Wouldn't a test involving the abilities required to answer the questions suggested be a power test, not a memory test *per se,* and reflect the kind of emphasis that should probably be placed on teaching *Macbeth?*

Major English tests today need to reflect the concept of education that learning is the process of changing behavior patterns. Our tests need to help students to obtain those types of behavior competencies that are important in English.

What are these competencies with which we should be concerned in our major testing? Certainly most of us will agree that they include two major abilities—the power to read and the power to write. The two abilities involve the well known tripod with which English instruction should be concerned today—language, literature, and composition. Therefore major examinations in our subjects should reflect instruction in these areas.

Probably the one area of our tripod least tested is language, except as language involves grammar and usage. We do give grammar and usage tests, more often than not in forms requiring pupils to underline a "correct" word or to fill in a blank. We do test pupils' use of grammar and usage in the compositions that they write. Beyond these two situations, however, few of us go because we do little else about language in our classrooms. Oh, yes, we may ask pupils to identify the figures of speech in a poem or a prose passage, but usually we don't even require the pupil to find the figurative language. We ourselves choose figures of speech, often those we have already discussed in class, and include them out of context, asking only that they be identified as similes, metaphors, personifications, and the like. How much more of a test

it would be to require pupils themselves to locate the figures of speech and then to comment upon the contributions they make to the poem or prose piece. Such a question would help pupils to develop both an understanding of the effectiveness of such language and an appreciation of it.

Of course, the real test of a pupil's ability to use language is to determine how well he can write. In his compositions we can check the correctness or appropriateness of items considered grammar or usage, the accuracy of his spelling, and the effectiveness of his diction. But we need to go beyond composition in language instruction and testing to give focus to the relationship between diction and tone, the appropriateness of tone to a particular subject and audience, the semantic implications of using an abstract word like *freedom* rather than a concrete phrase like *the right to vote* or of using an emotionally laden word like *rabble-rouser* to a more denotative phrase such as *believer in human rights.* To test such matters of language, we, of course, must be concerned with such aspects in our teaching.

How can we test such language matters? There are various ways, but one is to give pupils unfamiliar poems, parts of poems, or prose passages with specific questions aimed to require pupils to look at language. For example, suppose in a good tenth grade class, after studying the denotative and connotative power of words in poetry, we wished to test how well pupils were able to apply what they had learned. We might give them the poem "Marigold Pendulum," by Dudley Poore, with these instructions: "Often a poem is written to create a mood, not state an explicit idea. Dudley Poore's "Marigold Pendulum" may be an example of this type. By exploring some of the denotative and connotative meaning of *some* of the words Poore has used in this poem, write an essay of analysis in which you show how the poet achieved his results."

Such a test would really be an examination of a pupil's knowledge of denotative and connotative words *per se,* but it would also be a test of how well a pupil is able to apply what he knows about the power of words and the effect that both denotative and connotative words have in an entire poem. Such an examination also has the advantage of requiring pupils to discuss a matter of language in context in relationship to other aspects of language not specifically called for but nevertheless affecting the mood of this particular poem. No aspect of language can really be discussed in isolation from other aspects because of the interrelationships that exist. Because this poem is not one studied in class, such an examination will not permit pupils to reiterate what the teacher

and other pupils have said about it. It is a test of *their* knowledge and *their* ability to apply that knowledge in a new situation. If they can do well, they will have demonstrated their growth in the power to read a poem, at least in the aspect of language being tested.

Of course, the nature of a test must be adapted to the ability levels of pupils, and the test cited could not very well be considered appropriate for lower ability classes. The same kind of understanding about language and ability to read poetry, however, are desirable for them. Rather than asking these pupils to find the denotative and connotative words themselves and writing an analytical essay, we might choose another less complicated poem and ask specific questions about certain words in it, asking that they be identified as denotative or connotative. We might very well ask what the mood of the poem is, how they know that this is the mood, and what effect these denotative and connotative words have in creating that mood. We might ask whether the mood would be enhanced by one phrase rather than another or what effect on the mood one phrase that we would substitute would have over the one actually used in the poem.

To test the language of a prose piece, we might choose a paragraph or two from a novel, essay, or biography that pupils have read and discussed in class but which they, of course, have not had an opportunity to analyze completely for details of language. We might choose, for example, the following passage from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Huck's description of the dying Boggs and the mob: "The crowd closed up around them, and shouldered and jammed one another, with their necks stretched, trying to see, and people on the inside trying to shove them back, and shouting, 'Back, back! give him air, give him air!' . . . Well, pretty soon the whole town was there, squirming and scrounging and pushing and shoving to get at the window and have a look, but people that had places wouldn't give them up. . . . "

Depending on the ability level of pupils we are testing, we might ask one class, a better than average group, to discuss the two levels of the passage, not even telling them that one is pure objectivity in the manner of a reporter and the other is Huck's disgust with animal-like people slavering for morbid sensation. With a less able group, we might ask specific questions about the passage to cause pupils to see that there are two levels in this description. We might ask whether in this passage Huck expresses an opinion about the mob or suggests a reaction to the scene. We might then ask what Huck's description adds up to and whether

pupils think that Mark Twain chose his verbs deliberately and arranged them cumulatively purposefully to create a morbid sensation.

Testing details of language as language is used should be an important part of English testing today, but it can't be legitimately, of course, unless language is really taught as part of literature and composition and as a distinct discipline, too. A modern English curriculum will include grammar and usage, of course, hopefully reflecting the effects of linguistics and a recognition of levels of usage, but it will also include a study of words through etymology and semantics. It will involve a study of the history of language to develop an understanding and an appreciation of modern American English. It will include a study of rhetoric. It will stress the inherent relationship of language to thought. Likewise, a modern English testing program will reflect the study of these aspects of language. Only as we teach these various parts of language will we help pupils to develop power with language: only as we test matters of language will we be able to measure growth in language.

Major examinations in literature, too, need a different emphasis from those most frequently given, as suggested earlier in this article by the reference to a test on *Macbeth.* Too often we still give final tests that are almost entirely factual. If they go beyond the factual at all, they probably include a generalization that the teacher or someone else has made about the piece of literature and ask that the pupils discuss it. Such a question on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* might be: "During the course of the story *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Huck changed from a carefree boy to a thoughtful young adult. Mention three experiences he had and tell how each helped him gain a better understanding of life."

This question, of course, deals with one of the significant aspects of the novel, but certainly it is one that a teacher would develop in detail in a study of the novel. Should we, then, in a final examination ask a question at a level that permits a pupil simply to repeat what he has heard us and his peers say? Perhaps a synthesis question like this is appropriate, even necessary, in a low-ability class because it does require a pupil to rethink what he has heard and to organize his thoughts. Perhaps a question like this is even appropriate in a higher level class if it has not been answered previously in class discussions. But shouldn't a more able class have questions that require pupils to make their own generalizations about a literary work, to generalize from a work to its application to life, or to transfer a generalization into one's

own behavior? Edward J. Gordon of Yale University wrote brilliantly about these levels of testing in an article "Levels of Teaching and Testing" in the September 1955 *English Journal.*

If the emphasis in modern education is to be on altering behavior patterns, not on memory and the acquisition of knowledge *per se,* then our major tests in literature must be of the type that requires pupils to use knowledge and demonstrate their control over it. Our major tests in literature must help us to assess pupils' growth in reading; they must help them to grow in interpreting literature and in applying knowledge of literature to life and their own behavior, and enjoy literature, to prefer a really good poem to a poor one, to want to read, most of the time at least, novels and short stories that deal with the truth of human experiences. The phrase "altering behavior patterns" as a goal of modern education is not meant in the teaching of literature to be entirely utilitarian or moralistic or didactic, of course, for literature is important, too, on a purely esthetic level.

A literary question in which a pupil must make his own generalization concerning a phase of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* might be: "What did the pearl mean to Kino?" or "Should Kino have accepted the pearl buyer's price?" Both of these questions force a pupil to rethink various parts of the story and come to a decision, the generalization, which he then must support. Much more thought is required to answer these questions than if we answer them for the pupils and ask them to support the generalization we have given.

Occasionally we should go beyond testing particular literary pieces to examine pupils' understanding of the art of literature to determine whether they can recognize the difference between good and poor literature. One question, appropriate in a ninth grade short story unit, would be the following: "Below is the beginning of a short story, along with alternative endings marked A, B, and C. Choose the ending which you think shows the best development of the story and list the reasons why you chose it."

Such a question, of course, is a demanding one, since it requires pupils to know the characteristics of a good short story and to apply them in an analysis of three possible endings. From the clues in the endings they need to determine what probably happened in the story itself in order to discuss logical development, a single effect, characterization, faithfulness to reality, and other aspects of a short story that they studied in connection with the stories read in class. But a question like this one provides the only way we have to help us determine whether a pupil really under-

stands short story technique except, of course, to have him write a short story, which is of doubtful value for many of our pupils. A question like this one helps us to ascertain the literary perceptiveness and taste of pupils and is far more valuable, considering our ultimate goals in literature, than specific questions on literary works read in class. A question like this one, too, helps a pupil to apply knowledge and gives him satisfaction in using his mind. Even lower ability classes enjoy working with questions like this one, despite the higher intellectual processes involved.

A test question even more demanding but which gets at the realism of literary characters is this one on *Crime and Punishment:* "Dostoevsky has been criticized for creating an 'improbable' world in his novels. An atmosphere of near hysteria, a world peopled with murderers, sadists, prostitutes, and masochists, may have its shock value, so the argument runs, but is lacking in sufficient realism to engage our serious belief. Argue for or against the effectiveness of Dostoevsky's realism by a discussion of the plausibility of his characters. Limit your discussion to four characters."

Unless the literature we teach affects pupils' lives, it has been rather valueless. Of course, whether it does or not depends to a large extent on the appropriateness of the selection in the first place and on our teaching of it, but since testing is an integral part of teaching, or should be, our tests in literature should help pupils to see how they can generalize from a literary work and apply it to life. An example of this kind of evaluation would be such a question as this one, used after a study of *Death of A Salesman:* "Arthur Miller says: 'Tragedy arises when you are in the presence of a man who has missed accomplishing his job.' He also says that 'tragedy must arouse feelings of pity and fear,' but it must also bring us 'knowledge or enlightenment: knowledge of the right way of living in the world.' Discuss a situation that you know about or that you have experienced yourself, which may or may not have been tragic in the above sense but from which 'knowledge or enlightenment' developed."

Edward Gordon in his article suggests others, such as this one appropriate for younger pupils: "Explain the meaning of the veil in 'The Minister's Black Veil.' Give some examples of a situation from your own experience which demonstrates the truth of the story."

The real test of how well we teach literature is, according to Mr. Gordon, whether a pupil's understanding of literature carries over into his behavior. "This last is tested by observation of that behavior and is consequently the most difficult to evaluate," Mr.

Gordon reminds us. The one aspect of this level of testing that we can have some insight into is what, if anything, students are reading on their own. "It is here," Mr. Gordon says, "that we judge how much we are teaching reading."

Testing pupils' ability in composition is, of course, a continuous activity of all English teachers, for every time a pupil writes, we are testing his ability to write. The difficulty here is that we have always done more testing of writing than teaching of it, but that is another article.

We probably can improve our testing of composition by giving a focus in many of the papers that we assign. Too often we simply assign themes, unaware of the particular composition problems a pupil will face or at least not doing very much teaching about the problems beforehand. We usually wait until a pupil has written a paper and failed to handle it properly before we tell him what he ought to have done. By teaching a particular aspect of composition, such as how to handle comparison and contrast in one paragraph or in a five-paragraph theme or how to develop a topic by definition and analogy, we can give focus to a writing technique, alert a pupil to a particular method, and then, by evaluating his paper for his success in handling that method, help him to see that he has or has not succeeded. This method has the advantage, as far as the pupil is concerned, of enabling him to know what particular composition skills he is being tested on in a particular paper. Pupils are more likely to learn how to write if we help them to focus on particular writing problems inherent in the paper that we assign.

Testing aspects of language and literature is closely interrelated with the testing of composition, for when a pupil writes about language or about literature, he is, of course, revealing his ability in writing, and though we will give emphasis in our evaluation to the primary purpose of a question on language or literature, we cannot and should not ignore the form in which the answer is given. Thus, in a sense, we are always testing composition. Composition is the medium that brings together the tripod of our subject and makes it whole.

Testing our pupils is one of our important tasks—not to get grades but to help us to determine whether pupils under our guidance and instruction are really growing in English, not in their knowledge about language, composition, or literature but in the effect that their knowledge may have upon them as rational and humane persons. Our major examinations—unit, semester, year-end—must, therefore, reflect this emphasis. They must be

evidence that we recognize that knowledge consists largely of making analogies, of seeing similarities, of deducing principles and laws, that knowledge is general, that statements of knowledge are concerned with the particular.

On Teaching and Testing

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Do teachers perform two functions when they teach and test or only one? If your answer to this question raises more questions, things are as they should be. For questions determine their own answers and raise further questions, and provide the unity of teaching and testing.

There is no clear relation between our interest in teaching, or even our willingness to read students' compositions, and our interest in testing and willingness to prepare tests. True, there are some teachers who find testing their special pleasure, who become deeply absorbed in phraseology and standard deviations, but to most of us this pleasure is inexplicable and we write tests only with full exercise of whatever strength our characters possess. One reasonable justification for this willingness is that a good teacher is supposed to lead and encourage his students, not judge them. To encourage students for a term and then come down upon them with an evaluation seems dishonest, seems to place us in a false position.

Another reason may be that uncomfortable as playing two roles may make us, we are really fairly happy to play the second, but do it badly. We want to evaluate students, but we don't think that our evaluations are significant. Tests, by this argument, are merely an expedient motivational device, a threat we can hold over students to make them learn and, incidentally, to inform the teacher of how well they have done so. While the former attitude toward tests is more edifying, the latter is more utilitarian, and more pervasive. Tests discipline the student and inform his teacher. Whatever other reasons a teacher may have for testing, the pressures of teaching in a school require him to have that one, and it is not exciting.

There is no doubt that tests discipline students and instruct teachers, but I must suggest that they do more. For in a number of senses, some not at all obvious, tests also discipline teachers and instruct students, just as classes do. To remember this fact is to feel less traitorous in writing tests, whether pre-tests or re-tests.

WHAT TESTS DO

For the purpose of this discussion, *pre-tests* will be any tests, whether at the beginning of a school year or at the beginning of a single unit, which attempt to discover how much the student already knows about the subjects the class will discuss. The *re-test,* for a year or a unit, attempts to discover how much the student

has learned since the pre-test. Ideally, the pre-test and re-test should correspond. What the pre-test asks about, the re-test should also ask about. What the pre-test emphasizes the re-test should also emphasize. Since there are no *tabulae rasae* in high school classrooms, it makes sense to find out what students think before we start teaching. It means that we teach those students (I believe that is what Dewey wanted us to do), that we eliminate needless effort, and that both we and our students have the satisfaction of seeing improvement. It is both workable and motivational, as we have found in using the pattern in the English Project. Certainly there is less difficulty in devising a pre-test on a novel, to be taken after the students have read the book and before they discuss it, than in writing one on an area like semantics, where students are unfamiliar with terminology and the test must teach some terms. The difficulties, however, are not insurmountable.

One of the difficulties has been rewarding, and this is the point: pre-tests discipline teachers by making them decide what they want to teach. Without such pressure, teachers fall into the habit of saying things like, "I am going to teach *The Bridge of San Luis Rey,*" surely one of the world's least informative kinds of statements. Such declarations are not confined to teachers, for there exists whole curriculum announcements consisting of nothing but lists. What, just *what*, are we going to teach about, through, or with *The Bridge of San Luis Rey?* That is the question teachers must answer and the answer they must state when they talk about teaching. Another kind of uninformative statement is often heard, typified in the new teacher's assurances that "This unit will teach love of poetry." Both types are very vague and very frequent. Their vagueness, I am convinced, accounts for monumental squandering of classroom time. For which of us hasn't at least once explained his own purpose to himself in some such terms and wound up spending three weeks in class on a novel because the right things somehow weren't brought out the first week—the one week the job should have taken.

I cannot honestly claim that pre-testing makes teachers into marvels of efficiency, nor am I sure that efficiency is a worthy goal in itself. What I do know is that sitting down and writing a pre-test makes a teacher decide what he wants to do in very concrete terms and that the influence of this exercise on what happens in class is highly beneficial. It is a painful discipline, but valuable.

There is a second kind of discipline involved in writing tests. Everyone knows that some questions about a topic are simply more

interesting than others. It seems safe to assume that no teacher deliberately sets out to bore himself and his students, but writing a test makes the teacher decide (in advance of mid-class inspirations, which are less frequent than we might like to think) just what the interesting questions are and how students are likely to answer them. This means eliminating the trivial questions and recognizing that since no one teaches *Great Expectations* in order that students should carry away the name of Pip's great love, there's little point in asking about it on a test. The teacher might, however, choose as a minor objective that students should understand the complexities of the relationship between Pip and Estella, which is a good area for a question, but not yet either an interesting or an uninteresting one. "What is the relationship between Pip and Estella?" is the lazy man's way out. It is not only an uninteresting question, but a bad question besides, since it invites the student to take the lazy student's way out and summarize the plot. The appearance of such a question on a test means that the teacher has some sense of where the interesting questions lie, but he hasn't yet found them, probably because *he* hasn't thought out the relationship between Pip and Estella. It is easy, but silly, to assume that students are going to be miraculously clear about questions on which teachers are thoroughly muddled. The teacher who straightens out his own thinking will discover better questions, more interesting because they are closer to the heart of the subject: How would Pip's life have been different if he hadn't met Estella? Which ending accords better with Estella's character? What does the fact that Estella was Magwitch's daughter show about Pip's dreams? It is, admittedly, painful to struggle from the obvious questions to the interesting areas, to the interesting questions about these areas. The benefit is that the teacher discovers the interesting questions and in discovering them begins to find out what he is teaching.

The questions we ask on a pre-test on *Great Expectations* should correspond to questions on the re-test. Making up those corresponding questions involves a further discipline. If the tests are multiple-choice tests, there is yet another, that of deciding how students are most likely to go astray, since a multiple choice test must provide students with choices they are actually likely to make. Deciding what wrong choices students are likely to make is a discipline in itself. It means we have to know our students, know the way their minds work—a fascinating and difficult investigation in itself.

I think that by this time it should be clear where the pain comes

from in making up good tests, and I must take up the second part of my contention: that tests instruct students. There are both apparent and not-so-apparent ways in which this is true. Tests show students the kinds of things they ought to study. Certain kinds of tests can be arranged so that they operate like writing sequences and develop definite skills, the skills required for one test being repeated and expanded in the next. The less apparent instructive functions of tests arise not so much because of the nature of the subject or the nature of the course, but because of the nature of questioning.

Teaching and Questioning

Questions *are* the study of language, language being what an English class is about. The questions include: How do we communicate? What patterns are there in our communications? What is "meaning"? What kinds of meaning do we find in conversation, in poems, in stories, plays, novels? What do human patterns of communication reveal about the nature of human beings? Questions like these are what the serious student of language attempts to answer when he studies language. High school students being not entirely competent or serious students of language, the teacher of English leads his students to ask these questions by asking them other questions: Is the word "apple" the same as a real apple? How are the words "apple," "boy" and "idea" alike? What patterns are there in the words of "Twas Brillig"? What determines the meanings of the word "fence"? What is the meaning of *My Antonia?* Of *Hamlet?* And since each class hour cannot contain all of these questions, each class contains an order of questions: Is the word "apple" the same as a real apple? Is the word "fish" the same as a real fish? Where is the connection between the word and the thing? Why do we use "apple" and "fish" instead of "pomme" and "poison"? The questions for any given hour are comparatively limited, but they lead to the larger questions of a unit, and those questions, in turn, have to do with questions so fundamental that men seem to have been concerned with them as long as they have been conscious of their own use of language. It is not only with *Great Expectations* that the most interesting questions are the most basic.

I must note, and it is not simply in passing, that the answers to the questions we ask are not fixed for all time. Students have something to contribute by their answers as well as something to learn by being questioned. I suppose that if the answers were rigidly fixed, we would say that the order of questions was the

teacher's method and the answers were the lesson's content. That would make teaching a much more orderly procedure than it in fact is, but it would also make it a great deal less worthwhile. As things are, we continually learn that the answers are bound absolutely to the way we ask the questions, so we must say that content and method are one. This means that the responsibility of forming and ordering our questions is an exceedingly heavy one.

Most significant for the attitude we should take toward testing, for the reasons why tests instruct students, is the fact that the students and their answers are as much a unity as are the lesson's method and content. Every answer a student gives is part of the whole complex—a not necessarily consistent complex—of his attitudes toward himself and the world. The student who says that we use "apple" rather than "pomme" because the Angles and Saxons got together and established the word—and I have heard a student say just that—is operating from an entirely different set of attitudes than the student who says that we use "apple" because of convention. The student who says that Estella inspired Pip to make something worthwhile of himself is operating from an entirely different set of attitudes than the student who says that Estella was part of Pip's delusions. Less immediately obvious is the fact that two students who say that English usage is conventional may really be saying very different things. A student may not understand what he is saying, or may be saying it only because he thinks the teacher wants him to, or simply mean something very different by "convention" than the teacher does. There are infinite possibilities or, more precsiely, as many possibilities at any given time as there are students. Each student speaks not just for that question at that moment, but from his character, history, and other contexts. No answer is self-sufficient. We find out more about the attitudes producing an answer by listening to other things a student has to say and by asking him more questions, but at any single moment the attitudes which produced the answer are largely hidden from us and may be hidden from the student himself. The teacher sees only the part of the iceberg above water, and the student may not even be seeing that. This is no less true on a test than it is in an ordinary class period.

The teacher also sees a part of the student's attitudes that he would never see if he did not ask the question, which might not exist if he did not ask the question, since every question to some extent determines its own answer. If we ask, "What is the cause of rain?" the person who answers, though he has some latitude among kinds of causes, must not talk as though each rainfall was

a happy accident. Similarly, we can ask, "What is the purpose of teaching English?" or "Does teaching English have a purpose?" or "What social (or intellectual, or political, etc., etc.) aim does the teaching of English further?" In some sense, these questions are alike, but each limits the kinds of possible answers in a different way. The determining effect of the question is no less on an examination than anywhere else. But it would be a mistake to think of this fact as a limitation. It is part of the power of questions (and their peculiar power has been recognized from the time of Socrates to that of Carol Kennicott in *Main Street* and beyond) that by shaping the possibilities they force us to rearrange our thinking and search out appropriate parts of the attitudes we already possess in order to answer at all. And it might never have occurred to us before that either the question or its answer existed.

There is still something vaguely repulsive about the fact that questions partly determine answers. We have the feeling that we want to find out what the students think on their own, without our intervention. We all know, however, that there is no possible way of discovering what students think without asking them questions. This is partly because students don't know how to tell us what they think and don't know what we might be interested in knowing, but it is even more due to the fact that students often don't *know* what they think. They are like everyone else in that they learn their own views, their own potentialities and limitations, chiefly through questions, whether the teacher asks them or they ask themselves. Questions determine answers, but there is no other way to get answers. It is a fact we have to live with. Answers produce more questions, and that is another fact we have to live with always.

It is this determining power of questions which makes tests so instructive for students and teachers alike and makes the construction and answering of questions a part of the continuing education of both. Questions on tests operate in the same way as questions in class. Neither kind ceases to be a question at six-week intervals or loses its interest over the summer. This fact makes tests less "final" than we ordinarily imagine, but it also makes them less foreign to the cooperative teaching-learning process of the classroom. It means that teaching and testing are as much a unity as are method and content or the student and his answers.

In this view, constructing tests is as significant a teaching function as preparing for a class. This view of testing is the result of a particular view of teaching. But that is as it must be.

Work in Progress

WILLIAM CANTRALL
English Teacher, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Illinois

Mr. Cantrall describes dramatically the throes and rewards that can result from a cooperative effort to plan, design, write, and analyze a minimum essentials test in English. Principal contributors to the test were Josephine Allen, Frank Bacon, Dorothy Blackledge, Mr. Cantrall, Patricia Goodmon, Dolores Huegli, Aldo Mungai (department chairman), Jerry Parsley, Ralph Rausch (department chairman at South Campus), Louise Sheppard, and Bernice Zimmerman.

The idea for a minimum essentials test in English, cooking at Lyons Township High School for ten years, began to crystallize in the spring of 1962. Gaining approval and funds for a month-long summer curriculum workshop, the English department directed five teachers, representing all grade levels, to prepare a four-year scope and sequence in grammar, usage, and mechanics; a curriculum guide; and, if possible, a minimum essentials program.

Preliminary meetings exposed the uncertainty of the group members as to the views they were representing. Accordingly, they appealed to their colleagues in the department for grass-roots advice, ultimately compiling a massive questionnaire, which was loyally answered. On a visit to Evanston Township High School, the group derived particular encouragement from an account of a similar venture. Meanwhile, the department chairman at Lyons accumulated pyramids of curriculum guides, standardized tests, language texts, and professional writing on curriculum and testing.

The major task that summer of threshing out and setting down scope and sequence for grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling soon proved to be the best possible preliminary for cooperative test construction. For, in outlining the way to better teaching, this declaration of intentions also included what should be tested. Just as important, the group members concomitantly had learned to synthesize their ideas and their efforts.

Innocently happy that a whole week remained, the group started the coffee and their discussion of the now capitalized Minimum Essentials Test. (After a slow percolation, at least one of the objects of concern became heated and flavorful. Whenever it threatened to become bitter, the group started over on new grounds.) Finally, adopting parliamentary procedure—with motions, seconds, and voting—the group resolved that the test would

be given to sophomores, that the purpose of the test would be to improve learning, and that the students would be tested for mastery. *Mastery* was even blessed with a group definition.

Long discussions followed to select and weight areas to test: Capitalization, ten points; punctuation, fifteen points; recognizing structures, fifty points; usage, fifty points; spelling, twenty-five points. The group reluctantly settled for an objective test, but it couldn't be a "guess test." Ambitious for their students, the group proposed a test of significant length and thorough coverage.

As soon as basic purposes were established, group working methods developed. Although work was divided according to talent, knowledge, and sometimes the flip of a coin, the group collaborated and interacted continually. To begin the first step, a capitalization and punctuation test, one member surveyed the curriculum guide and recommended important principles for testing. After selecting from his recommendations, the group asked him to write a coherent anecdote as the vehicle for this part of the test. When he finished the first draft, a second member criticized it. A third member criticized the next draft. Everyone "took" the third version, while searched for ambiguities, and joined in polishing syntax and style.

After arguing over the difficulty and the importance of recognizing syntactical structures, the group gave considerable space to identifying the kinds and functions of phrases, clauses, and sentences. After the group decided on format, one member wrote items which another member reviewed. Then everyone read and discussed them together, rejecting some as too difficult in vocabulary or phrasing for sophomores. One aim was to avoid testing for sheer reading skill or intelligence. Many items were rewritten, criticized, and further revised.

As its second step, the group decided to select the 150 "minimum essentials of usage" by checking through the curriculum guide together. Then two members composed fifty sentences, each of which had to include three separate points. Other members reviewed these sentences and rewrote some of them.

The spelling test, the third phase, was a model of compromise. Initial views called variously for an exquisite sample of twenty words, for the cabalistic seventh and seventeenth word in each of seventy weekly lists, for a list of "spelling demons," for a test of spelling rules, and for no test at all. One member scanned the lists for one hundred words which illustrated spelling principles. A second member sorted the words into groups of four, picked

a likely test word in each group, and composed its misspelling. Everyone agreed that the items looked as handsome as those in familiar standardized tests.

Composing clear and concise directions for all parts of the test brought out the finest group effort. After a good deal of careful writing and editing, the group tried out several drafts of the directions on willing passers-by. A mere quizzical look often prompted further revision.

Though time and pay ran out, several members doggedly saw the one form of the test through mimeographing and wrote recommendations for its use. Additional forms were postponed until a proposed trial run. Months later, feeling rather like old soldiers at a veterans' picnic, the group gathered to hear the reaction of the school's administrative council. The council not only approved the recommendations for a trial run but also suggested that *two* forms be administered.

Suddenly back in action, each of four test authors "duplicated" his part of the test over a weekend. For recognition of structures, fifty new yet hauntingly familiar sentences were cut to pattern. For capitalization and punctuation, a familiar, often breezy anecdote "stood in" for its formal counterpart. One hundred more sentences were culled from the master list with no hope of matching the first set. Since preliminary testing had already located some obviously easy, difficult, and ambiguous questions, the usage section was actually rewritten and matched item by item.

When the test of 150 items was given in April, 1963, for study and advisory purposes, the medians of the two forms fell eight points apart. In September, 1963, a new five-member committee, with one holdover as chairman, took responsibility for the minimum essentials test and program. An examination of answer sheets showed that many of the average students had run out of time or had resorted to guessing. The committee decided to shorten the test in all parts, especially in recognition of structures. A differential analysis of each item compared the answers of the highest scorers with those of the lowest. Each part was then matched for item difficulty and differentiation. Some items which were too difficult or too easy or which failed to discriminate between good and poor students were thrown out. Other items were switched from one form to the other. Also some items on which teachers had commented were revised.

The committee found that the spelling sections were least alike: the level of difficulty was erratic; good power of discrimination was evident in only eight of the fifty items, and the committee

couldn't deduce why even those eight were good. Thus warned, the group started over. One member reanalyzed the complete list for spelling principles and produced matching lists of about fifty words each. He then dittoed a trial test with half of the words misspelled. A junior teacher gave it to his classes. Analysis showed only one consistency—students recognized correct spelling five times better than incorrect. A second trial test was made with a paired correct and incorrect spelling of each word, and another junior class played guinea pig. Results were tabulated, and two forms, which matched in content and difficulty, were prepared. As in the previous summer, three "strangers to the test" edited good copies of each form. Three teachers proofread the mimeographed master. Then three teachers "took" each form, reconciled their answers, and prepared a master answer sheet.

In April, 1964, all sophomores took the test. A control group took both forms. Each student in the Regular, Superior, or Honors English sections[1] who failed this test was required to take a forty-hour makeup course in the summer or during his junior year. Teachers received item analyses for their classes.

Soon somebody will make new tabulations, new correlations, new analyses. A group of teachers will make more revisions and more forms. Other tests are shaping up, and it is hoped that their shapers will have had training in curriculum and test construction. Especially it is hoped that each group is compatibly aggressive; the politely effete are poor test makers.

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[1] These three sections contained 78 percent of the sophomores.

Criteria for Teacher-Made Tests

HELEN STAPP

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English departments work toward consistency in the presentation of English; they need also to work for the development of common aims and qualities in the tests that they give their pupils. The English teachers at MacArthur High School have worked out together rules that they follow in planning the content of a test of a unit just taught, constructing the actual test, and administering the test.

1. *Reviewing unit aims and objectives.* The teacher's first step in planning a unit test is to list the basic concepts that are included in the unit just taught.
2. *Determining content and emphasis.* The teacher reviews his aims and emphases, being sure that the items in the test will cover adequately the material he has been teaching and will stress the special parts that he has stressed in class. Important topics within a unit should be included several times within a test; those of lesser importance, once or twice only. If material not in the text has been assigned to all, that should have a part so that students will come to realize that reference material has importance.
3. *Deciding what can be tested and what types of tests to use.* This can be done best by examining a taxonomy or breakdown of possibilities such as the following:
   a. *Testing for knowledge.* Some of the items in a test will call for knowledge: knowledge of terminology, such as verse terms; knowledge of specific facts; knowledge of conventions, including educated usage; knowledge of classifications, as the types of literature.
   b. *Testing for understanding.* Some items include translation, such as making literal statements from figures of speech; interpretation, giving the thoughts of the whole poem or story; and extension of the idea in a story, novel, or play.
   c. *Testing for application of facts and generalizations.* Tests in English language belong in this group, whether the student completes the context of sentences given by the teacher, composes sentences from words and groups of words provided, or writes sentences of his own. Tests in literature can ask students to relate central ideas to everyday living.
   d. *Testing the ability to analyze.* Tests can ask for reasons for events in a literary work. Tests can also ask for an analysis

of a work as representative of a period. Analysis can be required in the ability to see relationships, such as the relationship of a work to other representative pieces of a period or succeeding periods.

e. *Testing for original, creative thinking.* If a test is given to students of varying abilities, the various discussion questions can require different levels of thinking, even different types of thinking. Rewriting a story from a different point of view or discussing how the ending of a novel would have been changed if a certain incident within the novel had ended differently calls for creativity and reveals the students' understanding of the selection.

f. *Testing for critical thinking.* Students may be asked to find examples of valid and false reasoning in a series of paragraphs. A comparison of two poems on the same topic may call for discrimination.

4. *Taking precautions.* The following might prevent grief for both teacher and students:

a. *Avoiding value judgments.* Questions demanding value judgments generally elicit superficial answers. Only a group of good thinkers who have had much class experience in evaluation should be asked such questions; they would be expected to organize their replies well and to show depth of thinking. "I like 'The Ransom of Red Chief' best because it has lots of humor in it," is of little value to the student or to the one who is judging his paper.

b. *Using various types of questions, some objective and some essay.* Objective test scores will often give students a different ranking from the rank obtained through essay test scores. Objective items at the beginning of a test may enable slow starters to go more easily into essay topics later.

c. *Varying the level of difficulty.* Just as some questions should challenge the brightest, so some should let even the poorest students have success. Objective items should proceed from easiest to most difficult.

d. *Being clear and specific.* With all students, but especially with students of slower comprehension, the teacher should include such specific directions that the student has no doubt as to what he is to do. "I didn't understand what you wanted us to do," if said by several students when tests are returned, is an indication that the test was not carefully worded. With students in the lowest quartile, test results

will be better if the teacher guides the students in the amount they are to write, as "Give five reasons why . . . ." "Write a paragraph telling . . . . " All key words such as *analyze, summarize, compare, contrast* should mean the same to the students as to the teacher.

e. *Giving students some leeway.* A student who faces questions at the beginning of a test that he cannot answer (but should answer) often feels panic build up within him. If given a choice of questions, he may, after selecting questions which he feels confident he can answer, come back to some of the first items and answer them competently.

5. *Setting standards for grading.* The last task in constructing a test is to set up a standard for grading. What values do the various items have? Since this is a test in English, how much should the students be penalized for errors in form?

6. *Establishing positive attitudes.* During their entire high school career, students should be led to understand that there is no honor in getting through a test first, but there is honor in writing a well-organized paper which has been done accurately and completely. Students' attitudes toward tests are based on their previous experiences with tests. If their teachers during all four (or three) years of high school are conscientious in their planning of tests, skillful in their constructing of tests, and fair in their administration of tests, students will come to regard tests not as a special kind of torment but as a chance to show what they have learned and are able to apply.

The Attitude Scale in Literature

MARCIA WEBER
English Teacher, Pontiac High School, Pontiac, Illinois

Through the use of an attitude scale, Mrs. Weber discovered some things about her students' appreciation and understanding of drama that she did not discover through objective tests. The attitude scale, she concludes, deserves more attention as an English test, for it can help the teacher to identify and evaluate the changing personal reactions of students to literature as they mature in literary appreciation and taste.

When an English teacher plans a unit of study for high school students, he is guided not only by certain segments of knowledge which he wishes to convey but by certain attitudes which he wishes to modify. When he and his students complete the unit, the teacher is confronted with the problem of testing the students on attitudes as well as on knowledge. It is probable that the teacher will find that the solution to the problem of testing for attitudes cannot be found in the administration of objective tests of subject matter or subjective "essay" tests of student opinion. Possibly, a teacher-made scale which would state the various aspects of students' attitudes toward the work studied comes closer to a solution.

In a recent experiment in teaching drama to ninth grade students,[1] the writer devised and administered an attitude scale which attempted to measure aspects of student appreciation after the students had read and studied plays. The scale was, of course, not the only test given, but it revealed information which the writer would not have gained from the more traditional tests.

Because the writer felt as a teacher she could not know unerringly the various problems that students in the ninth grade customarily encounter in the reading of plays, not to mention the various attitudes that ninth grade students might have as they weigh the values and problems of reading plays, the writer circulated among students in classes other than her own a questionnaire consisting of two open-ended questions. The questions asked simply: "What do you like about reading plays? What do you dislike about reading plays?" From the students' responses she devised an attitude scale of approximately 30 items.

Examples of the items found in that attitude scale are as follows:

[1] Marcia Weber, *A Comparison of Two Methods of Teaching Drama in the Ninth Grade,* Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Illinois, 1964.

The names of the characters are given before the characters speak.

1. This is confusing to me.
2. This is somewhat confusing to me.
3. This has no effect.
4. This aids me.
5. This aids me greatly.

Plays can aid the reader in solving his own problems.

1. never
2. almost never
3. sometimes
4. fairly often
5. very often

The reader feels he must finish the play in one sitting (feels that he can't put it aside until he has read the whole play).

1. not at all
2. almost never
3. occasionally
4. much of the time
5. almost always

Each of the 30 items was stated positively, if possible, as a complete sentence. The 1–5 choices were worded as uniformly as possible. However, as the examples show, it was necessary to change the wording somewhat so that the choices made sense as responses to each statement. The scale of 1–5 choices was a continuum designed so that for all items the "1" answer indicated that to the student certain things relating to the reading of plays were confusing or without value, whereas the "5" answer indicated that the student believed that certain things were an aid by enhancing his understanding. These directions were given: "There are no right or wrong answers, so your answers will in no way affect your grade in the course. Your responses will simply indicate how strong your feelings are about the various items." The students were instructed to circle 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 to register their feelings about each statement.

To aid further understanding, the writer provided the students with a sample item just prior to administering the attitude scale. The students then began the attitude scale and responded to each statement. When all students had completed all items, the writer collected the forms. Because the writer wanted the students to be as frank as possible, she did not ask that the students sign their names to their papers.

The teacher-made attitude scale is relatively new and little used by those who teach English. Because its value as a test

instrument does not lie in its use as a measure of a student's mastery of subject matter, the attitude scale would not be decisive in determining an individual student's grade. The attitude scale is, however, invaluable as a measure of the teacher's success in bringing students closer to a greater appreciation of, or even a greater toleration for, the large literary concepts.

In the writer's experimental study, comparing methods of teaching drama in the ninth grade, the attitude scale was particularly effective. Although the writer found little difference in using an analysis of variance from class to class on the results of an objective test, she noted a significant difference in attitude scores.[2] The table below shows the percent who made choices at both ends of the continuum.

ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDE CHOICES MADE IN ALL GROUPS

Class	*No.*	*Percent making 4–5 choices*	*Percent making 1–2 choices*
Traditional	40	39.02	21.96
Experimental	43	51.17	16.28
Control	39	41.00	23.07

On the basis of the above analysis of the attitude scale used by the writer, it would appear that differences do occur from group to group, differences not discoverable by means of an objective test. The writer was especially interested in responses to one item in particular. This most significant item in the attitude scale asked simply: "If given a choice, would you rather *read* or *see* a play?" One group's response[3] was significantly different in that almost 42 percent preferred to read plays. The table below notes these differences.[4]

Results from a teacher-made attitude scale have a great deal to tell the teacher of literature. Through the use of the attitude scale, the teacher gains a greater knowledge of his success or failure in changing and enlarging his students' literary tastes.

The teacher might experiment with different approaches, as did the writer, using the attitude scale as a partial check on the

[2] P. 35, thesis.
[3] Experimental group.
[4] P. 36, thesis.

PERCENT OF RESPONSES TO THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ITEM IN THE ATTITUDE SCALE AS CHOSEN BY ALL GROUPS

Class	*No.*	*Rather Read a Play*	*Rather See a Play*
Traditional	40	9.76	90.24
Experimental	43	41.86	58.14
Control	39	12.82	87.18

effectiveness with which he helps students to develop taste in literature. The use of the attitude scale by the teacher has value then as a tool by which he can improve his own craft.

Through the use of these same attitude scales, the teacher could gain greater understanding of his students, both as individuals and as a group. In private conferences with individual students the teacher might mention aspects of the attitude scale, inviting students to elaborate upon their choices. Or the teacher might use completed attitude scales to initiate class discussion. He might go through each item, commenting on the responses made, suggesting participation by the group.

In either situation the teacher could point out the fact that students within a given class hold different attitudes toward the same body of work studied. Perhaps the teacher could go further to show students that their attitudes change as they grow in their experience with the given type of literature or literary concepts.

Of course, the teacher-made attitude scale is little used. Such a scale takes time—to compose, to administer, and to evaluate. But its value in giving teachers insight into themselves and into those they teach far outweighs any other limiting factor.

The Essay Test in Teaching the Concept of Literary Analysis

JANET BARKER
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English teachers who have tried to use tests as teaching tools have realized that the task is an extremely difficult one. For those who need a new plan of attack, especially in view of the growing emphasis on close reading, Miss Barker offers some very promising suggestions. Offered also are some interesting ways to integrate literature and composition.

Far too many high school students are unable to write simple literary analyses and criticisms. In some cases, these students only review plot. Their critical comments on literature are usually limited to "I think this was a very good book," or "I liked this book very much, although I don't plan on reading it again." When high school critics do make actual value statements about elements of style or theme, too often they write only miscellaneous generalities without specific support; or they may include specific points which are irrelevant to their main ideas. These writers seem to be unable, in fact, to differentiate between the general and the specific. To their forlorn English teachers' disappointment, their composition is not composed; their logic seems illogical; and their knowledge of literature appears to be nil. They obviously do not understand what literary analysis or criticism is.

Perhaps students could overcome the weaknesses enumerated here if teachers pointed out how readers can inductively or deductively arrive at each sound literary analysis or criticism studied. Induction and deduction are two basic forms of written analysis. Students need to grasp the ideas that every analysis and every criticism must be grounded in this logic, and that every critical or analytical composition should evince this logic. If students can recognize form in analytical thought and analytical writing, not only will they write better but they will understand literature more precisely and more independently. A teacher trying to communicate this concept of literary thought and writing might approach A. E. Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" as follows:

PLAN FOR PRESENTING "TO AN ATHLETE DYING YOUNG"

I. Objectives
   A. To help students understand the meaning of the poem
   B. To help students understand how one arrives at the meaning of the poem

1. By leading them through the steps of analysis with inductive questioning
2. By pointing out with a summary outline how one derives and proves generalizations about the poem by examining specific parts of the work

II. Content

A. Meanings of individual parts of "To an Athlete Dying Young"

B. Overall message of the poem

C. Summary of process by which final analysis has been reached

III. Reading and discussion

A. Oral reading of poem by teacher

B. Discussion of questions asked by teacher

1. What do you think Housman's overall message is in this poem? Is Housman sad that the athlete died young?
2. Prove your answer is true by pointing out specific spots in the poem that convince you that you are right.
3. In the first stanza what do you learn about the situation of the poem?
   a. About whom do you learn some facts?
   b. What other answers to the questions "Who? What? When? Why? and Where?" do you learn?
4. In the third stanza, to what place is Housman referring when he talks about fields where glory doesn't last and where laurels appear quickly but wither right away? From what place, or town, has the young athlete slipped away?
5. What does Housman mean when he talks about the laurel? Is laurel symbolic of anything that you know of?
6. What impression do you get of Housman's attitude when he says, "Smart lad"?
7. What is the advice Housman gives the young athlete in the last two stanzas?
8. Prove your answer is true by telling what each phrase means.
   a. What does the poet mean when he advises the athlete to "set . . ./The fleet foot on the sill of shade"?
   b. What is the "sill of shade"?
   c. What will the athlete do if he follows the poet's advice and holds the "still-defended challenge cup" up to "the low lintel"?
      1) What is the "challenge cup"?
      2) Why is it "still defended"?
      3) Do you know what a lintel is?
      4) Why is the lintel low in this case?
   d. Why will the athlete's garland be unwithered in heaven?
   e. Is the garland briefer than a girl's a very glorious one?

9. Now let's go back to our first question. Have our findings proved you were right about Housman's overall message? Is he sad that the athlete died young?
10. In one sentence tell what he says to the young athlete.
11. Do you suppose that Housman's message is for the dead athlete only? What does this poem mean for you?
12. Can you think of a time when you were a hero in some way? Would you have been smart to get out of the situation where you were the "big shot" before other people decided for you that you wouldn't be so important anymore?
13. Other questions which may be added

C. Summary of process by which final analysis has been reached

1. How did we figure out the overall meaning of the poem?
2. Could you prove by specific parts of the poem that Housman thinks the young athlete is better off either dead or alive? List proof.
3. Can you explain how there is logic behind our conclusion that Housman means this?

IV. Important ideas and conclusions

A. Housman's message can be found in both general and specific parts of the poem.

B. There is a logical way to discern the meaning of a literary work, and there must be logical proof for any valid interpretation of literature.

C. An effective way to explain one's own interpretation of a literary work is to state it in general terms, to prove it is valid by giving specific parts of the literature for proof, and then to restate the general interpretation.

D. One example of a generality about a work is a statement telling the work's overall meaning. Specific proof may be found in the meaning of a short part of the work.

V. Evaluation—subjective judgment of students' responses to the questions and short test to be given later.

Now that the teacher has guided his students to the meaning of the poem by the logical process by which that meaning can be determined, he can have the students write a valid literary analysis by giving them a test which will channel their answers into the form of a composition. By giving the following test and later using it as a teaching device, the teacher can compel his students to take at least one step in the transfer from analytical class discussion to analytical composition:

OPEN-BOOK TEST ON "TO AN ATHLETE DYING YOUNG"
(EXERCISE TO DEVELOP WRITTEN LITERARY ANALYSIS)

1. In one or two sentences tell whether A. E. Housman says that the young athlete is better off either dead or alive. Begin with the following words: "In 'To an Athlete Dying Young,' A. E. Housman says that _____ . . ."

2. Tell what place Housman means by the "fields where glory does not stay" in the third stanza. Begin with the following words: "The poet tells the young athlete he is smart to get away from _____ . . ."

3. To finish the following sentence, tell what Housman means by "And early though the laurel grows/ It withers quicker than the rose." Begin: "In this place where 'glory does not stay,' _____ . . ."

4. In the sixth stanza the poet gives the young athlete some advice. Finish the following sentence, and in your own words tell what two things he wants the young man to do: "Housman tells the athlete to _____ and to _____ . . ."

5. What will happen to the youth's glory when he gets to heaven? Begin with the following words: "In heaven the young man's glory will _____ . . ."

6. Why is it important that the athlete's garland is briefer than a girl's" at the end of the poem? What do these words mean? Begin your answer with the following words: "It is important to notice that the athlete's garland is "briefer than a girl's" at the end of the poem because _____ . . ."

7. Now check all the answers you have given so far. Do your answers to questions 2–6 give five specific pieces of evidence that prove you were right about question 1? If not, ask yourself if you really understand the meanings of the passages in questions 2–6. If you're sure you do, then you need to change your answer to question 1. Make sure your first six answers don't contradict each other, and then in one or two sentences explain generally what you have said. You should have explained A. E. Housman's overall message. Begin with the following words: "A. E. Housman says to his reader that _____ . . ."

The answers to these questions, if taken in unbroken sequence, make a logical and somewhat convincing, though incomplete, written analysis of the poem. If this fact is pointed out to the students, they should begin to understand what a written literary analysis is. Each should rewrite his set of answers in the form of a composition without changing sequence. The teacher should explicitly direct the students' attention to the general statement beginning the composition, the specific support which follows, and the summary generalization. He should make sure that the students see similarity in the forms of the composition analysis and the earlier in-class analysis.

Once a student begins to understand the logical progression

both in analytical thought and in written literary analysis, his test questions should demand more initiative from him. They should become much less restrictive so that more of the burden of organization will lie with the student. For the sake of easy comparison, the following less restrictive questions deal again with "To an Athlete Dying Young":

CLOSED-BOOK TEST ON "TO AN ATHLETE . . ."
(EXERCISE TO DEVELOP WRITTEN LITERARY ANALYSIS)

Answer the following questions in sequence, but write your answers together in the form of a convincing literary analysis.

1. In one or two sentences tell whether A. E. Housman says the young athlete is better off dead or alive.
2. In several sentences explain six specific phrases or sentences from the poem which prove your answer to question 1 is true.
3. Now check what you have written. Does your answer to question 2 support your answer to question 1? Make sure it does, and then summarize in one or two sentences Housman's overall message in the poem as it might be concluded from what you have said so far.

By giving successively less restrictive tests and by pointing out the analytical form they encourage, the teacher can help his students to complete the transfer from literary analysis in class discussion to independent individual analysis. At the same time he can test students' factual information. Test unreliability is caused by the small, perhaps unrepresentative sample of information covered by a test, by the students' lesser insight into what answers the teacher wants, and by the subjectivity unavoidable in grading. Essay tests used in the manner suggested here, however, would overcome some of these weaknesses. The students' understanding of the pattern by which answers should be given helps to prevent generalities, and an answer key and clear ideas of what is being tested help to overcome subjectivity. The value of the essay test in teaching the organization of written literary analysis forbids its absence from the English classroom. Essay tests of this sort integrate language and literature. They obey the educational psychologist's demand that tests be educative as well as evaluative. They do evaluate knowledge of literature. Perhaps equally important, this kind of essay test can prepare our high school students for their college English courses. In college the student will be obliged to write valid, logical literary analyses. Essay tests in high school can teach students to differentiate between general and specific, between valid analysis and guess. They *can* even teach students to support generalizations and to organize their analyses logically.